THE GRACIOUS ERRAND OF CHRIST;

OR, THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

UNSPEAKABLY BENEFICIAL TO MEN;

Wisely adapted, and ultimately designed, to be an

UNIVERSAL BLESSING TO THE WORLD:

A

SERMON,

Delivered at an Association of Ministers, held at *Coggeshall, Essex*, September 9, 1794,

And published, with some Additions, at their Request.

By RICHARD FRY,

TEACHER OF LANGUAGES, &c. AT BILLERICAY;

Hæc admittenda religio, non tantum ob factorum testimonia, de quibus jam egimus, verum etiam ob ea, quæ religioni sunt intrinseca: cum nulla ex omnibus sæculis ac nationibus proferri possit, aut præmio excellentior, aut præceptis perfectior, aut modo, quo propagari jussa est, admirabilior. HUGO GROTIUS.

SUDBURY:

PRINTED BY JOHN BURKITT;

AND SOLD BY JOHNSON, LONDON; CLACHAR, CHELMSFORD;

AND BY THE AUTHOR.

[*Price Six-pence.*]

THE

GRACIOUS ERRAND

OF

CHRIST.

LUKE, ix. 56.

For the Son of Man is not come to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.

THE more attentively we conſider the ways of the ſupreme Being in his providence, the more clearly ſhall we perceive, that the events which are accompliſhed by the laws which he has wiſely eſtabliſhed, or by the interpoſitions of his hand, are the effects of moſt benevolent deſigns, and beſt adapted to promote the general good. And when we reflect on what we profeſs to believe, that the ſame being who diſpoſes all things as the God of providence, is alſo the author of the Chriſtian religion, we may, with the utmoſt propriety, expect to find it a ſyſtem of divine excellence, diſplaying the brighteſt tokens of good will towards men: for the nature of God muſt remain the ſame; the ſame unſullied and gracious attri-

butes muſt enter into his plan, whatever may be the operations of his hand. Profeſſing to believe in Jeſus Chriſt, according to the repreſentation which is given of him in the goſpel, we declare our eſteem of him as the true Saviour, and as bearing an authentic commiſſion to inſtruct mankind in all concerns of a religious nature: and the higheſt expectations that we can poſſibly form of the divine beneficence, as that which muſt be diſplayed in a religion proceeding from God, are anſwered in the fulleſt manner in the doctrines, in the precepts, and in the character of our bleſſed Redeemer. All abundantly conſpired to manifeſt, that he came into the world to propagate a cauſe that was worthy to engage the regard of mankind; to eſtabliſh in the hearts, and in the ſociety of men, a religion of heavenly origin, pure and gracious in its nature, and which had a direct tendency to promote their real and beſt intereſts; to render them virtuous and pious, happy and uſeful in this life, and bleſſed in the world to come. The Son of Man came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them; to be their friend, their great deliverer from miſery and death, and in no reſpect their enemy.

A little attention to the circumſtances which occaſioned this aſſertion of our Lord, will be of particular uſe in aſſiſting us to underſtand clearly, what he deſigned to communicate and enforce; or what is the proper import of this his declaration. The context imforms us, that it was our Saviour's intention to go to Jeruſalem, which he made known to his diſciples, two of whom were appointed to be the harbingers of his approach. When theſe diſciples,

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James and John, entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for their Lord, they did not experience any of that hoſpitality to which they were entitled on ſo great an occaſion. Such was the bigotry of the people, in favour of their place of worſhip, that they refuſed to receive Chriſt, becauſe *his face was as though he would go up to Jeruſalem;* or, becauſe they underſtood he was a Jew, and had gained information that he was on a journey to the Jewiſh temple; a place which they, in their prejudices, diſdained. On receiving this incivility, and being witneſſes of the ſlight caſt upon their honoured maſter, the minds of the two meſſengers were exaſperated to a high degree, and they even conceived a deſire to ſee the vengeance of heaven wreaked upon this prejudiced and refractory people, as the puniſhment of their perverſeneſs: and they ſuppoſed the conduct of Elijah to afford a precedent that would vindicate ſuch an awful wiſh; at leaſt, their manner of alluding to that prophet's mode of proceeding, on a very ſignal occaſion*, ſeems to ſignify, that they conceived the utmoſt indignation againſt the enemies of their maſter, even to their temporal deſtruction, was juſtifiable. Thus they addreſſed Chriſt, *Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, even as Elias did?* Though this requeſt was congenial with the indignant feelings of theſe fallible diſciples, yet was it the breathing of a ſpirit altogether inconſiſtent with the mild temper of Jeſus, and repugnant to the nature of

* See it related in the firſt chapter of the ſecond of Kings.

pure chriſtianity; and could therefore on no account meet the concurrence of our Lord. He was diſpleaſed with their addreſs; he turned and rebuked them ſaying, *ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of.* And he immediately added a declaration of the end of his miſſion: *the Son of Man came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.*

This was a conciſe, yet a very full, and expreſſive aſſertion of the nature, the deſign, and tendency of that ſyſtem of religion, which it was his great errand to deliver, and to eſtabliſh in the world, as the moſt beneficial to mankind. And our endeavour ſhall be, divine goodneſs aſſiſting, to conſider what ſupport to the truth of this aſſertion, and its meaning, may be derived from the diſpenſation of goſpel-grace, or the Chriſtian religion itſelf, as it was taught by our Lord—then the teſtimony which was afforded by his own life and character to its truth—and laſtly the glorious evidence which may be expected, at the grand conſummation of the Meſſiah's kingdom in the world.

I. We have to inquire how it appears from the diſpenſation of the goſpel, or Chriſtianity, as it was taught by Chriſt, that it is a religion in the higheſt degree beneficial for mankind.

That diſpenſation under which Elijah lived, and wrought the penal miracle in defence of the honour of God, which emboldened the diſciples to propoſe imprecating the fire of heaven to deſtroy Chriſt's enemies, was an œconomy of dread. It then pleaſed the moſt High to vindicate and maintain the dignity of his holineſs, often-times by the viſitations of his anger,

anger. The whole hiſtory of the Iſraelitiſh Church and nation, preſents to us the hand of Jehovah arrayed in awful terror, and ſcourging his adverſaries, whether the rebellious amongſt that people, or thoſe who were as enemies oppoſed to them. There was, indeed, ſome mercy mingled with the terror of the ancient diſpenſation; but, comparatively viewed, it was only as a glimmering ray; it fell very far ſhort of being made perfect, though it was the means of introducing the œconomy of the New Teſtament, and opening to the world the dawn of heavenly day: to the Jews it was a twilight, but the day-ſpring from on high hath viſited us. *The law was given by Moſes, but grace and truth came by Jeſus Chriſt.* Nothing reſembling the lightnings, and the thunders, and the dreadful uproar of Mount Sinai, accompanied the advent of our Redeemer; but the glad tidings and joyful ſalutations of angels, united with the grateful ſongs of gentle ſhepherds. Nothing like the peſtilences, the famines, and the ſlaughters, permitted among the Iſraelites; or inflicted upon them to enforce the divine authority, or to ſcourge their heinous guilt, were uſed by Chriſt to compel attention to his inſtructions, or to promote the intereſt of his name. Though divine was his authority, and tranſcendant his true dignity, yet mild was his demeanour in all his intercourſes with men. And though he could have ſurpaſſed all the ſplendour of earthly monarchs, and have obtained legions of angels, yea all the hoſts of heaven, to aſſert his honour, and by irreſiſtable energy to eſtabliſh his kingdom on earth, yet was he *meek and lowly, riding upon*

upon the foal of an aſs; and truſted the ſpread of his cauſe to its native purity, the kindneſs of his manifeſted intention, and the power of evidence and argument, which were abundant in its favour. He ſtood unmoved amidſt the contradictions and buffets of his adverſaries; and, in the gracious tranquillity of his mind, and the ſupernatural lenity of his manner, he gave a moſt convincing proof of the mildneſs of the goſpel-diſpenſation. The New Teſtament Church is the Mount Zion of mercy, the heavenly Jeruſalem, where ſmiles of love, inſtead of frowns of wrath, are diſcovered; where every thing verifies the delightful chorus with which it was uſhered into the world, *peace on earth, good will towards men.*

All that our Saviour taught, bore the cloſeſt analogy to the nature of his diſpenſation, as it was explained by himſelf; and there was not a doctrine that he divulged, but was pure, and tended to enlighten the underſtanding, and to draw the ſoul nearer to God: nor was there a duty that he enjoined but was excellent in itſelf, and conducive to the welfare of mankind. The grand doctrinal truth which our Lord declared was, that he came down from heaven, even from that glory which he had with his Father before the world was, as the *unſpeakable gift* of divine wiſdom and mercy; not only to announce, but alſo *to be the author of, eternal ſalvation, to all them that obey him;* which he was to accompliſh by giving himſelf *a ranſom for many*, or by *laying down his life for the ſheep.* This truth, though not a new idea to the world, was before but imperfectly underſtood; and it came from

his

his own lips, in a new and more intelligible ſhape, than any former revelation of it: and though this did not alter the nature of believing, it more clearly defined its object, and ſimplified its tenour, and the mode of divine worſhip, which is its grand and primary effect. And this, together with other communications proceeding from him, ſo new-modelled the Church of God in the world, as to conſtitute it a new œconomy, bearing the moſt legible ſtamp of the compaſſion of God, and the ſtriking impreſſion of the love of his only begotten Son. The miſſionaries of the goſpel who were raiſed up to diffuſe the knowledge of Chriſt, appear to have entertained the moſt elevated conceptions of him, and of all that compoſed his mediatorial character. While they extolled him as *the expreſs image of the inviſible God, the* FIRST BORN *of every creature;* they rejoiced in him as a proper Saviour, as a propitiation for ſin, *an offering and a ſacrifice to God of ſweet-ſmelling ſavour; who bore our ſins in his own body on the tree, who hath obtained redemption and reconciled us to God.* And this, with its connections and dependencies, they eſteemed, and treated as laying the moſt ſecure foundation for hope, conſolation, morality, and holineſs. This view of redemption was not peculiar to the firſt age of Chriſtianity; the ſame idea has been entertained in all ages by the diſciples of Chriſt, and the juſtice of the ſentiment has been happily illuſtrated by its ſalutary effects.

If we particulariſe the precepts and duties of Chriſtianity, they will evidently demonſtrate their ſtrict correſpondence with the promotion of human happineſs.

happineſs. To this, nothing can be ſo oppoſite as vice; and, if vicious propenſities were in any reſpect countenanced and encouraged by the goſpel, then would its dictates be proportionably injurious to the world: but, inſtead of this, the whole of revelation directly tends to counteract and deſtroy the influence and exiſtence of moral evil; and, in the ſame degree as it does this, it muſt tend to advance the intereſt and felicity of men. Whether we conſider ourſelves as individuals, or in a ſocial capacity, our enjoyment of life, and all its appendages, muſt depend upon the ſtate of our minds, in connection with the tenour of our conduct; and, as far as the religion of Chriſt tends to the improvement of theſe, it claims to be conſidered, as largely contributing to our happineſs.

The beſt principles and diſpoſitions that can form the character, are ſtrenuouſly inculcated by the goſpel of Chriſt; while it gives the cleareſt revelation that can be deſired of the divine Being, not only that we might have juſt information concerning his exiſtence, but alſo that we may conceive the moſt exalted and conſiſtent ideas of him; ſo it alſo teaches what frame of heart is ſuitable to the knowledge of God; or what are thoſe affections which we ever ought to cultivate towards him. By numerous precepts, we are taught to reverence his holy name; and we may conſider all the deſcriptions recorded in ſcripture, of the majeſty, and glorious perfections of the moſt High, as implying ſolemn injunctions to reverence, becauſe ſuch repreſentations, when believed in, muſt produce in the mind

mind a devout awe. If indeed the revelation of him went no further than to deſcribe his grandeur, and majeſtic attributes, the human mind would only be provoked to fear, and to ſhrink into its own inſignificance, and vileneſs; but it opens to our views the richeſt diſcoveries of the purity, and beneficence of the divine nature, that the moſt ſincere love, and gratitude might be excited in our breaſts, towards the great Giver of every good, and perfect gift. And its chief commandment is, thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy ſoul. The Chriſtian religion further inculcates the moſt humble, and devout ſubmiſſion to the ſovereign will of our heavenly Father, as being the perfect manager of all concerns. We ought to be reſigned to his pleaſure in all his diſpoſals; for every event of his providence we ſhould ourſelves moſt heartily approve, if capable of taking a comprehenſive ſurvey of the whole ſyſtem of which it compoſes a neceſſary part, and what we know not now, we ſhall know hereafter. Calm, and unreſerved confidence in God, is alſo its dictate; and this is a diſpoſition of mind moſt properly inferred from all the expreſſions of divine goodneſs, veracity, and faithfulneſs; wherever theſe affections prevail, they muſt produce a deſire, and endeavour to pleaſe and to honour God; and both private and ſocial worſhip, by which God is glorified, are enforced by Chriſtianity. Chriſt expreſsly enjoined it upon his diſciples, that they ſhould enter into their cloſets, and pray to their Father who ſeeth in ſecret, and will openly reward his obedient ſervants. We are

commanded not to forſake the aſſembling of ourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is, under the ſolemn conſideration that *the day of God is approaching.* And what can we conceive to be more juſt, and reaſonable in itſelf, than for men to worſhip the infinite Deity; for creatures to render the homage of the tongue, of the heart, and of the being, to their adorable Maker; and what can be more honourable and dignified to men, than to be admitted, by worſhip, to hold communion with that eternal Being, to whom belong infinite power, and glory!

The Chriſtian religion alſo preſcribes a ſuitable temper with regard to ourſelves, and its correſpondent duties. Erring man is, alas! too prone to conſider happineſs as conſiſting in the gratification of the natural appetites and deſires, in immoderate indulgences, and in carrying lawful enjoyments to exceſs: he has alſo a baneful bias to evil paſſions, at the expence of his neighbour's peace and welfare. By the goſpel we are taught the folly and perverſeneſs of nature, in ſuch inſtances; and how much wiſer and happier it is to moderate our deſires, and to bridle our paſſions, than to indulge them: by its inſtructions, reaſon is enlightened, conſcience is ſoftened, and all licentious propenſities are reſtrained, if not ſubdued. It commands the temperate uſe of the bounties of providence, a virtue beneficial and ornamental, and productive of ſatisfaction; while exceſs is injurious to health, defaming to the character, and ſpoils all enjoyment. Self-denial is another perſonal duty required, which conſiſts in reſiſting thoſe inclinations of the heart

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which would certainly, in the end, prove miſchievous to ourſelves, as well as diſhonourable to God, however luſcious a preſent gratification of them might ſeem to the depraved appetite. The examination of ourſelves is a duty of unſpeakable importance, implied in ſelf-denial, and expreſsly commanded. The treachery of our nature, renders Chriſtian watchfulneſs over our ſenſes and affections, neceſſary as well as uſeful; and Chriſt directed his diſciples to watch and to pray, leſt they ſhould enter into temptation. As a ſentinel ſtationed near the camp of an enemy cannot be too vigilant to prevent a ſurpriſe, ſo Chriſtians can never be too much guarded againſt the variety of ſnares with which they are encompaſſed. We might further mention meditation, as a required perſonal duty; and creation, providence, and redemption, all afford ample ſcope for the contemplative thought. Indeed, a diſpoſition to virtue and piety may be conſidered as the ſum of all the reproofs, warnings, and exhortations, of the goſpel of Chriſt; for *all ſcripture is given by inſpiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine and inſtruction, to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto every good work.*

A becoming temper of mind towards our fellow creatures, and the various duties which men reſpectively owe to one another, are included in that courſe of obedience which the diſciples of Chriſt are commanded to purſue. A little acquaintance with the nature of ſociety, the connection of the different parts, their dependance on each other, and the inequality of the various members, will ſhew the neceſ-

ſity of many virtues to preſerve the order and well-being of ſociety, if not its very exiſtence. Human laws are inſtituted to enfore virtuous actions, and to prevent the contrary, by reaſon of this neceſſity. But where the inſtitutions of men cannot reach, there begins the true religion to operate. It is no merely the evil of actions, which is oppoſed by the prohibitions, and commands of God's word; but they pertain to the heart, which is the ſeat of all the ignoble motives and paſſions, from whence practical vices proceed. Wherever its due influence extends, it cannot fail to implant every virtuous and amiable quality. So ſtrictly are moral precepts enjoined by the goſpel, that whatever ſavours of immorality, is utterly incompatible with it; and it is impoſſible to maintain the genuine character of Chriſtians, without having a conſtant regard to the moral virtues in our intercourſes with mankind; for juſtice, fidelity, chaſtity, benevolence, and the like, are numbered amongſt the component parts of that truly noble character. And ſuitable actions are the only proper evidences that can be given, of poſſeſſing thoſe diſpoſitions which the right knowledge of divine truth inſpires: to every rank and ſtation in life are aſſigned its peculiar duties: maſters and ſervants, parents and children, huſbands and wives, are commanded to fill up their reſpective relations with decorum, becoming godlineſs. And it is required of all, that they do unto others, what, in ſimilar circumſtances, they would wiſh to have done unto themſelves. Yea, it is preſcribed to them, who ſuſtain the Chriſtian profeſſion, that they be of forbearing ſpirits towards thoſe who

who may have injured them, that they exerciſe forgiveneſs in the place of wrath and revenge; and make it the object of their ſolicitude to render good for evil. Such a diſpoſition of kindneſs, and its conſequent acts of benevolence, which become incumbent when opportunity offers, manifeſt what is the ſpirit of true piety, and promote human happineſs by preventing many occaſions of bitter reflection; by rendering men the moſt uſeful members of ſociety; and by yielding a general placidity to the mind, which can never conſiſt with the dominion of vice.

The excellent and beneficial nature of Chriſtianity further appears, in ſecuring obedience to its holy precepts, by preſenting to our views the nobleſt motives, and inſpiring the ſoul with the moſt glorious hopes. Rational agents are actuated by motives in all their conduct; and while the goſpel guards againſt thoſe things as motives which are unworthy and baſe, proud and vain-glorious, it propoſes thoſe which are moſt pure, and beſt calculated to anſwer the deſired end. Such are its motives and aims, as cannot but have a powerful tendency to render evangelical holineſs infinitely preferable, both to a courſe of iniquity, and a ſtate of liſtleſs inaction; and to excite a heavenly ardour in the Chriſtian race. *That God ſo loved the world as to give his only begotten Son; that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life*, is a conſideration, when duly conceived, that expands and fills the contrite ſoul with humble admiration; it ſurpaſſes all that hope itſelf could ever aſpire to; it begets grate-

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ful deſires, breathing devout love; and prompts to the diſcharge of every known duty. The frequent contemplation of this, is well calculated to arouſe the dormant principles of piety, to invigorate every ſlumbering affection of the heart, to arm it againſt all the ſeductions of ſin, and to attach the ſoul to the divine honour. Deplorable indeed is the condition of that man, who feels no emotion of gratitude at ſuch a revelation, and whoſe obduracy forbids his joining the enraptured exclamation of the apoſtle, *behold what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed upon us!* The Redeemer's love, in his voluntary humiliation to reſtore ſinners to the favour of God, to life, and glory, muſt be an influential motive to ſincere obedience, with all who have been convinced of the *exceeding ſinfulneſs of ſin.* What but pure compaſſion, could urge ſo great a character to ſuch an amazing ſtoop! Pity was the ſpring of his deſigns, in his wonderful undertaking, from being rich, to become poor; from being highly exalted, to appear lowly abaſed; from being the admiration of angels, to become the contempt and deriſion of men; it was, *that we through his poverty, might be made rich.* From being in poſſeſſion of glory and purity, he ſtooped to be reckoned a tranſgreſſor, and to give himſelf for a ranſom. Surely ſuch pity deſerves a return; love ſo free and immenſe, muſt poſſeſs charms to allure the ſoul; let it but be properly viewed, and rightly eſtimated, and the language of the believing heart muſt be in uniſon with that of Paul, whoſe ſoul was charmed with the excellence of this great motive, *the love of Chriſt conſtraineth me.*

The information that we receive by the goſpel, that there is not only a poſſibility, but a certainty of pleaſing and honouring God by obedience, operates upon the ingenuous ſoul, as a ſtrong influential motive to moral, and religious duties. Can finite and ſinful creatures in any reſpect contribute to the honour of eternal majeſty? Though his infinite glory, can no more admit of addition than his ſpotleſs purity, yet he is pleaſed to account himſelf honoured by the devout obedience of his ſervants: and this he has revealed to excite them to the moſt vigilant attention in his ſervice, and fervent endeavours to perform his will. In this God propoſes the moſt grand and ſublime motive that can be entertained by the human ſoul; and it is impoſſible that our faculties and powers can be engaged in any purſuit ſo truly ennobling, as that to which this motive actuates, which this glorious hope induces: for it is the ſummit of the ardour and delight of angels, to pleaſe, and glorify, the eternal ſource of life, light, and bleſſedneſs.

There is the moſt cloſe connection between pleaſing God, and promoting our own peace and proſperity; and this is another of the motives which genuine Chriſtianity recommends. The great author of our frame has implanted in us a conſcience, which may be regarded as a ſacred principle, holding a peculiar connection with his own divine authority; as it dictates, urges, and reſtrains, with reſpect to moral good and evil. Habitual ſinning, will ſtupify and ſear the conſcience, but peace of mind can only be enjoyed with its tenderneſs and ſenſibility, in the courſe

courſe of virtue and piety: and the religion of Chriſt teaches us to maintain a conſcience void of offence both towards God and man, becauſe all its directions infallibly lead to thoſe things which are approved of God; which muſt tend to the promotion of righteouſneſs, and to advance the welfare of ſociety. And this is another of the truly excellent motives that Chriſtianity inculcates. As far as its influence prevails it muſt correct that ſelfiſhneſs which is natural to the mind, but improper; and as all its deſcriptions and dictates conſpire to enkindle benevolence, it will conſequently actuate to produce ſuch actions as are beneficial to others, and in the ſtricteſt ſenſe thoſe are ſo which manifeſt juſtice and philanthropy. The Chriſtian's deportment, acting under its genuine influence, and conſiſtent with its pure principles, is both perſonally and relatively advantageous; and it is the predominant deſire of his heart to be uſeful in his day and generation, as widely as his ſphere extends.

The goſpel alſo inſpires the ſoul with the good hope of a reſurrection to eternal life. And this bleſſed evangelical hope operates as a cogent motive in the race of the believer's high calling. Here Chriſtianity meets in the moſt ſatisfactory manner the fondeſt wiſhes of the heart; as it clearly reveals to the panting longing ſoul what nature could never with certainty inſtruct, nor even afford an intimation of, a ſtate of permanant exiſtence after the revival of our frames; and an eternal world of joy to be corporeally inherited. Only by the goſpel are *life and immortality brought to light.* Here we have the

ſtrongeſt

ſtrongeſt aſſurance that *bleſſed are the dead who die in the Lord;* that they ſhall *live again;* that Chriſt is the *reſurrection and the life;* that he who *believeth ſhall be ſaved;* that he who is *faithful unto death ſhall receive a crown of rejoicing*: that they who ſuffer with, or for Chriſt in the fleſh, ſhall reign and triumph with him, in the glory to be hereafter revealed. The heavenly reſt is to be expected, not as a merited reward, but as the promiſed portion of grace, the happy end of obedience; and this hope we have as *the anchor of the ſoul both ſure and ſtedfaſt.*

II. To conſider the teſtimony derived from the life and character of Chriſt to the truth of his aſſertion, that he came not to deſtroy, but to ſave men's lives. Or, how the excellency of Chriſtianity was exemplified in the perſon of its founder.

The doctrines and precepts, which our Lord delivered to mankind, would have been equally good, in themſelves, ſuppoſing that we were not favoured with any information concerning his perſonal conduct: but we have notwithſtanding, the greateſt reaſon to admire the divine wiſdom, in giving us, in the life of Chriſt, ſuch a confirmation of the excellence of his precepts; and ſo ſtrong a recommendation of the doctrines of Chriſtianity to general attention.

Beſides the ſtriking diſcovery of our Lord's forbearance, in the inſtance which occaſoned the reply in the text; we have ſeveral other recorded examples of his extreme averſion to the exerciſe of any degrees of rigour, tending to the hurt of men with whom he

took up a temporary abode; though numberleſs inſtances occurred, from the malice of men, which would have juſtified his indignation, and have vindicated the utmoſt ſeverity. The whole of our Redeemer's character, was of a complection directly oppoſite to the ſevere, and to every thing baneful. It is true indeed that Chriſt aſſerted that he came *not to ſend peace on earth, but a ſword, and to ſet a man at variance againſt his father:* but this he uttered, not to declare the end of his miſſion, not to deſcribe the nature of his diſpenſation, nor to aſſert the temper of his mind; but as a prediction of thoſe calamitious effects, which the goſpel would eventually occaſion, as naturally reſulting from that oppoſition, which evil-minded men would raiſe to its progreſs in the world. Every part of his life exhibited the moſt perfect innocence. He was an offender to none; guile was never found in his mouth. He even wrought a miracle to pay tribute to the temple leſt he ſhould offend. *He was holy, harmleſs, undefiled, and ſeperate from ſinners.* His nature poſſeſſed not that frailty which could betray him into errors, or into crimes. Mankind in all ages have been led to the commiſſion of evil deeds by the influence of depraved paſſions, and their weakneſs has rendered them the victims of ſeducing temptations; but our Lord was perfectly free from all thoſe affections which were not in the higheſt degree holy; and ſuch was his wiſdom and power, that he deſpiſed the good that deluſions promiſed, and glorioufly triumphed over all the powers and ſtratagems of darkneſs. The malignity and craft of

his

his enemies, ſometimes brought him into the moſt ſevere and trying circumſtances, yet he never failed to acquit himſelf with moſt conſummate integrity. Deceit and hypocriſy were moſt abhorrent to every ſentiment of his mind, as was vain-glory to the whole tenour of his converſation. He might have poſſeſſed a world of pageantry, and have exalted himſelf upon the wreck of imperial grandeur, but he was uniformly poor in ſpirit, and lowly in heart. All his attendant diſciples were frail, and diſcovered the infirmity of their nature; they ſerved as foils to diſplay and enhance the bright perfection of his character, which was never ſullied with a ſingle inſtance unworthy of his commiſſion. Such was his conſciouſneſs of abſolute innocence, that he could confidently appeal to his bittereſt foes, whoſe ſilence evidenced in his favour, "*Which of you*," ſaid he, "*convinceth me of ſin?*" And even the heathen judge before whom he was arraigned, under the heavy accuſations of being a fomenter of ſedition, an opponent and rival of Cæſar, and a blaſphemer againſt God, frankly confeſſed, "*I find no fault in this man.*"

The innocence of Chriſt, however amiable and tranſcendent, may be termed only negative goodneſs; but beſides this his life was beneficial to the utmoſt. He ſtood in the world as the great prodigy of unequalled excellence, owing not his diſtinction to literary acquirements, to philoſophical communications, to political arrangements, or the invention of new ſciences or arts; no, his worth was of a ſuperior order, and his utility of a more exalted kind. He was the great object of ancient prediction, the anti-

type of all that was glorious of old: he was moſt emphatically THE SON OF GOD. While he plainly pointed out the path of duty, he gave to the world the ſubſtance of former ſhadows; he developed the myſteries contained in the obſcure types and prophecies of the Jewiſh Church: like the faithful and true witneſs, he gave a clearer revelation of the will of his Father than was ever known, reſpecting the great ſcheme of redemption, concerning acceptance with God through mediation, and the divine forgiveneſs free and plenary. He drew aſide the curtain that concealed from human ſight the deep things of God, which were kept ſecret ſince the world began, and has opened to our views the brighteſt proſpects of ſalvation complete and everlaſting, *having conſecrated for us a new and living way through the veil, that is to ſay his fleſh.* Theſe are infinitely more important concerns than thoſe things can poſſibly be, in which the preſent life is wholly intereſted. But his uſefulneſs was not confined to this elevated ſphere; as he deſcended to thoſe offices which are proper in themſelves, though comparatively mean, and in the diſcharge of which he was examplarily beneficial. Behold his filial piety; his public duty in rendering tribute; his pacifick ſpirit and care to promote peace; the ſympathy of his heart in all the ſcenes of diſtreſs that he witneſſed, and his unwearied diligence to ſuccour the needy; the humility of his demeanour; and the general juſtice of his character. In a moſt aſtoniſhing meaſure he was actively uſeful by the performance of miracles, far exceeding human ability unaſſiſted, and far ſurpaſſing human

conception,

conception, all of which were ſubſervient to the aims of benevolence. Many blind perſons reſtored to their ſight, the lame cured, lepers healed, and eſpecially ſpiritual captives releaſed, were the ſignal monuments of his beneficence, as well as the trophies of his wiſdom and power. The compaſſion of his heart towards indigent objects, and pining ſinners, was never ſparing, if they but deſired his bleſſing. "*I am come*," ſaid he, "*that they might have life*, "*and that they might have it more abundantly*."

The life of Jeſus preſents a ſeries of acts of kindneſs done to his enemies. The higheſt idea that we can entertain of the influence of virtue on the mind, or of a truly amiable ſpirit, in a moral view, is ſuch a temper of mind as is leaſt diſpoſed to harbour envy and revenge, or other malignant paſſions; and moſt inclined to exerciſe forbearance and forgiveneſs on all occaſions. It was impoſſible for the beauty, or excellency of this diſpoſition to have been better exemplified, than it was in the ſpirit of our divine Maſter. Had the inſtances been rare of his manifeſting kindneſs in return for injury, the meekneſs of his temper would have appeared with a leſs degree of luſtre; but very frequent were his opportunities of ſhewing his good will in return for malevolent treatment. Indeed the whole of his publick life was a continued ſcene of provocation and inſult on the part of his enemies; and inſtead of his rendering evil for evil at any time, his expoſtulations were mild and gentle, and his habitual endeavours were fervent to do good to them who hated him. The ſword of *Peter* which was offered in his defence,

and

and actually uſed on the moſt ſolemn occaſion, when his life was in imminent danger, yea when there was a certainty of extreme violence being exerciſed upon him, he diſapproved and rejected; and miraculouſly healed the wound which it had inflicted. He would permit no bloodſhed for the preſervation of his perſon, any more than for the propagation of his cauſe; and though he could have made all nature tributary to his aid, though he might have controuled the angels of heaven, or the lower elements to avenge his enemies, he diſplayed the moſt dignified patience under all that he endured. When beſet by the extremeſt malice, when all the dark horrors of agony and death were combining around him, he beſought God that the iniquities of his embittered adverſaries might not be remembered againſt them. *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Chriſt was as eminent in obedience to his Father as he was for purity of character amongſt mankind. He maintained a conſtant correſpondence with God his Father, by addreſſing his ſincere ſupplications to his ear, and by offering to him the ſacrifices of praiſe. Knowing that it became him to fulfil all righteouſneſs, as being the great Mediator and pattern of his diſciples, as well as from the pureſt love to God and holineſs, he was ever found in the diſcharge of obedience to him. *It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will,* however ſevere the denial it might occaſion to himſelf. The moſt humble and devout ſubmiſſion diſcovered itſelf under all the diſpenſations of his over-ruling hand. When ſuffering grief and ſorrow, ariſing from the moſt

acute

acute contemplation, and excruciating ſenſe of divine wrath, beyond all that our imaginations can meaſure or deſcribe, he murmured not; but ſerenely acquieſced. *The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, ſhall I not drink it?* He never attempted to abuſe the dignity, or the truſt committed to him, or to counteract his father's deſigns, or to ſet up any aims of his own in oppoſition to thoſe which were revealed to him, *but made himſelf of no reputation.* This was his motto through the whole of his mediatorial courſe, *I ſeek not mine own will, but the will of him that ſent me.*

Thus then it appears, that Chriſt confirmed his doctrine by his perſonal obedience, that every part of his life gave ſtability and beauty to the precepts which he delivered to men; and that he was conſtituted fit, both in his nature and qualifications, to be the redeemer, the lawgiver, and the exemplar of the goſpel church.

III. We have briefly to enquire into the glorious evidence that may be expected to the truth of this aſſertion, and its import, at the grand conſummation of the Redeemer's intereſt and kingdom in the world.

If what has been advanced, be admitted a fair and juſt deſcription of the Chriſtian religion, and the ſpirit of its Founder, what may not be properly expected to be the reſult of a cordial perſuaſion reſpecting its veracity, and the prevalence of its influence in the heart? In all ages the faith of the goſpel, both in individuals and in ſocieties, has been productive of the happieſt fruits, and it may be juſtly hoped

hoped that its general extent would produce univerſal happineſs; for what is true in a leſſer, muſt be ſo in a greater ſphere. The ſame cauſe will ever produce the ſame effect, and the dimenſion of the conſequence muſt be in proportion to the magnitude of the cauſe from which it proceeds. And the ſame divine energy which, accompanying the truth of the goſpel, renders it effectual for pulling down evil imaginations, and the ſtrong holds of ſin, in one inſtance, muſt be equally capable of producing the ſame effect in reſpect to the greater part, or even every one, of the human race, if ſuch be the good pleaſure of his will. And ſhould ſcripture be found to afford any good ground for entertaining an apprehenſion, that in ſome future period, the goſpel of Chriſt ſhall have a univerſal ſpread; and that its divine influence and power ſhall pervade all claſſes and deſcriptions of men, it cannot fail of exciting the moſt delightful emotions in every heart, that has by it been ſoftened into devout love, and rendered a fit ſoil for holy and benevolent deſires to grow and flouriſh in. In the animation of ſuch a glorious hope, the Chriſtian diſciple cannot forbear exclaiming, *come Lord Jeſus, come quickly.*

It ſhould ſeem that the ancient prophets of God, who were inſpired and inſtructed by his ſpirit, foretold events concerning the kingdom of the ſon of man, or the Meſſiah, which have not as yet had ſuch an accompliſhment as they ſtrongly induce an expectation of. And it appears that thoſe to whom was communicated the ſpirit of prophecy, after our Lord's death and aſcenſion, conceived that the glo-

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rious ſcenes of the Chriſtian kingdom, predicted in ancient time, and foreſeen by themſelves, were reſerved to bleſs the eyes of ſucceeding ages. Beſides the numerous intimations reſpecting the kingdom of Chriſt in its extent, given in the prophecies of *Iſaiah* and *Zechariah*, and others, this kingdom was very particularly announced by the prophet *Daniel*, *I ſaw in the night viſions, and behold one like the ſon of man, came with the clouds of heaven, and there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages, ſhould ſerve him: his dominion is an everlaſting dominion, which ſhall not paſs away, and his kingdom that which ſhall not be deſtroyed*†. And the ſame prophet largely deſcribes under the figure of beaſts, the huge antichriſtian power, which ſhould exalt itſelf in oppoſition to the Meſſiah's intereſt, and *proſper till the indignation be accompliſhed.* And the apoſtle *John*, whoſe book of revelation is much in the ſame ſtrain, and by whom the ſame figures are adopted, predicts the reign of antichriſt as of long and awful duration, the downfall of which ſhould uſher in among men the proper kingdom of heaven; or the diſpenſation of the goſpel in that extent and glory which belong to it, *when all nations ſhall come and worſhip before God*, and when *the kingdoms of this world ſhall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Chriſt, and he ſhall reign for ever and ever*§. And the apoſtle *Paul* in writing to the Theſſalonians, whoſe minds appear to have been diſconcerted with the

† Dan. vii. 13, 14. § Rev. xi. 14. xv. 4.

proſpect of *the day of Chriſt*, gives a minute and appropriate deſcription of the *ſon of perdition*, or antichriſt; and foretells its deſtruction to be effected by the *brightneſs of Chriſt's coming*‡, which may intend either the power that ſhould accompany his perſonal appearance for the extenſion of his kingdom, or the newly acquired energy of evangelical truth itſelf, to render it univerſally predominant. And it ſeems to be foretold, that this kingdom ſhall not only have the acquiſition of the Gentile nations, or *the uttermoſt parts of the earth;* but that all the Jewiſh tribes ſhall be likewiſe added to the Redeemer's inheritance; at leaſt ſuch deſcriptions are given of their general penitence, reſpecting the crucifixion of our Lord, and their conſequent return to a national ſtate, as never have yet been realized. *I will pour npon the houſe of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, the ſpirit of grace and of ſupplications; and they ſhall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they ſhall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only ſon; and they ſhall be in bitterneſs for him, as one that is in bitterneſs for his firſt born**. *I will bring the remnant of Iſrael from the north country, and gather them from the coaſts of the earth. They ſhall come with weeping, and with ſupplications will I lead them*§. *I will ſeek out my ſheep, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land: and I will ſet up one ſhepherd over them, and he ſhall feed them, even my ſervant David. And I the Lord will be their*

‡ 2 Theſſ. ii. 8. * Zech. xii. 10. § Jer. xxxi. 8, 9.

God,

God, and my ſervant David a prince among them, I the Lord have ſpoken it†. This great character under the name David, who ſhould be conſtituied the prince, or lawgiver and ſhepherd of Iſrael, cannot but be conſidered as intending the Meſſiah, who was *the root and offſpring of David*, and who agreable to this and other predictions, proclaimed himſelf *the good ſhepherd of the ſheep. Look upon Zion the city of our ſolemnities, thine eyes ſhall ſee Jeruſalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that ſhall not be taken down, not one of the ſtakes thereof ſhall ever be removed, neither ſhall any of the cords thereof be broken**. *And the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*, which God will create, and which as the apoſtle *Peter* obſerves we are, *according to his promiſe, to look for*, notwithſtanding that the heavens being on fire ſhall be diſſolved, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat, will conſiſt in part at leaſt, in creating *Jeruſalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy*§. Our Lord himſelf, who was predicted to be the *deſire of all nations*, gave a ſtrong intimation of a period to come, when the Gentiles at large, and the Jewiſh people, ſhould be added to his kingdom: *and they ſhall fall by the edge of the ſword, and ſhall be led away captive into all nations, and Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled—then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh*‡. And the apoſtle *Paul* affectionately diſcovers

† Ezek. xxxiv. 12—24. * Iſ. xxxiii. 20 § Iſ. lxv. 17, 18, and 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13. ‡ Luke xxi. 24—28.

that he had hope of the time, when *the fullneſs of the Gentiles ſhould come in, and when all Iſrael ſhould be ſaved*‖.

The *thouſand years*, or the millenium, of *John*, cannot but be regarded as a bleſſed period, ardently to be deſired, however it be underſtood; whether as intending the perſonal reign of Jeſus Chriſt on the earth, or the general and unmoleſted ſpread of evangelical truth and holineſs. In either caſe the condition of the world muſt be vaſtly improved, and the felicity of mankind muſt ſupplant abundance of wretchedneſs. Previous to this bliſsful period, or to the ſetting up of the kingdom of the goſpel in the moſt enlarged ſenſe, there muſt be a great change effected, not only in the ſtate of men's minds, but alſo in their habits, and external condition, to prepare the way for it: and there is the higheſt probability both from intimations given, and from the nature of the change itſelf, that this will be brought to paſs by tempeſtuous convulſions, horrible in the extreme, repreſented under the moſt lively characteriſtick emblems, ſuch as terrible earthquakes, diſtreſs and perplexity of nations, rolling a burning mountain into the ſea troubled and roaring, hail and fire mingled with blood, ſmiting and darkening the ſun, and the moon, and the like.

To our obſcure underſtandings it appears aſtoniſhing, that the great Supreme ſhould have permitted a diſpenſation, ſo infinitely merciful and beneficial as that of the goſpel, to come in any degree

‖ Rom. xi. 25, 26.

under

under the power of depraved men; or that he ſhould have permitted *the myſtery of iniquity* for ſo many ages to triumph over it, and to trample it under foot. But unqueſtionably God has had wiſe ends to anſwer by this permiſſion, and will make it finally redound to his own glory, and the good of his people. Though omnipotence can have no impediment or bounds, yet its purpoſes are uſually accompliſhed by means; and we cannot form any conception of the diſpenſation of the goſpel being widely extended, or its truth generally embraced, while the condition of mankind remains what it now is. Before that which directly tends to ſave, and not to deſtroy men's lives, can be prevailing, it muſt firſt counteract and aboliſh many evils and woes, under which millions of the human race now ignorantly groan. Falſehood, infidelity, prejudice, ſuperſtition, perſecution and tyranny, muſt be ſhaken to their foundations and effectually ſubverted, before the kingdom of the Meſſiah can properly riſe in its glory, and when it riſes it muſt be eſtabliſhed on the ruins of theſe mighty miſchiefs. Hitherto the goſpel diſpenſation has been but the little ſtone inviſibly hewn out of the mountain; or but a little leaven hid in a meaſure of meal; or but a tender vine waſted by the wild boar of the foreſt. Divine purity has been tarniſhed, and divine love obſcured, by the fumes of human vices. Men have practiſed under the Chriſtian name the moſt daring and preſumptuous iniquities, inflicted the moſt ſore and deſperate calamities; and while they have acted this diabolical part, have been ſeen and heard to glory in their ſhame. They have

have made the goſpel the ſtalking horſe of guilt, the ſtandard for palliating and promoting of crimes; they have perverted this ſceptre of grace into an inſtrument of oppreſſion, an engine of torture for perſecuting and deſtroying human happineſs and life. Yes, men of our natures, propenſities, and paſſions, to the diſhonour of our race, and to the diſgrace of the world, have exhibitted the very climax of guilt; they have ſacrificed heavenly mercy at the ſhrine of their infernal luſts! Shall not the God of infinite juſtice and purity reckon for theſe things? Muſt not ANTICHRIST, that huge principality of hell and darkneſs, have its utter overthrow from his almighty power? Muſt not the time come when the goſpel of grace and truth ſhall have free ſcope, yes liberty from heaven, for earth has yielded it but little, to reveal to the univerſe that it is deſigned and adapted to ſave, und not to deſtroy? If our higheſt conceptions of God aſcended no higher than to the delineation of an upright angel, or even of a very virtuous benevolent man, we are conſtrained to imagine that the groſs perverſion of heavenly wiſdom, and all the dreadful evils practiſed in combination with it, muſt be heinous and odious in his ſight; but when we glance, and this is all that we are capable of, when we glance at the purity and perfection of the divine character, and his ſupreme love of order and goodneſs, muſt not our minds be deeply impreſſed with this idea, that ſuch evils are and muſt neceſſarily be, in his eyes moſt deteſtable abominations.

If then the numerous prophecies, which ſeem to intimate

intimate that the goſpel kingdom ſhall be ſo enlarged as to comprehend all the nations, and kindreds, and tongues, of the earth, do really intend this event: then muſt this be an object which the great manager of all affairs continually keeps in view; yea it muſt be the grand central point towards which all the diſpenſations of his providence perpetually tend. And all the abuſes and perverſions of goſpel truth, and worſhip, which have been permitted to men of corrupt minds to invent, and to the potentates of the world to enforce, have been ſecretly over-ruled by infinite wiſdom to prepare the way for, and the more effectually to accompliſh, and the more ſecurely to eſtabliſh this kingdom in its glory; as the vehement contentions of men's depraved paſſions, and the violent ſtruggles of their forces may be rendered the proximate means of introducing that day, when *the God of heaven ſhall ſet up a kingdom, which ſhall never be deſtroyed; which ſhall not be left to other people, which ſhall be divers from all kingdoms, and ſhall break them in pieces, and conſume them, and which ſhall devour the whole earth, and ſtand for ever**. *And the Lord ſhall be king over all the earth: in that day ſhall there be one Lord, and his name* ONE§.

This grand empire of grace in ſuch vaſt extenſion and glory, as we truſt will appear, muſt in part conſiſt in the general prevalence of divine knowledge and truth. Human learning and ſcience are left to our reſearches, they admit of advancement, and have

* Daniel ii. 44. vii. 22, 23. § Zech. xiv. 9

been

been making progreſs towards perfection, though in a manner monopoliſed, and confined to the few; but divine wiſdom revealed is already complete, and the ſyſtem only wants to be duly underſtood, that it may be cordially believed. And where the means of inſtruction are poſſeſſed, its moſt important articles lie level with the meaneſt capacity, at leaſt to that extent in which it is neceſſary for them to be received. But in Chriſtendom there has not only been a ſad deficience with regard to the means of knowledge of every kind, eſpecially that which is religious, but ſuch methods have been adopted under the Papal and ſimilar hierarchies as prevent its ſpread, ſeeing that ignorance is moſt favourable to oppreſſion, as it debaſes the mind with prejudices, and ſuperſtitions, the moſt irrational and degrading. And it muſt be expected that recourſe will be had to the ſame diſgraceful methods, as long as an inclination connected with a power to oppreſs exiſts. This unjuſt power, by the creeds and articles it has impoſed, by the rites and formularies it has preſcribed, and the diſcipline it has cheriſhed, has deformed and darkened Chriſtianity, concealed it from the many, and ſubſtituted in its room conceits the moſt pernicious, and maxims and manners the moſt baneful to ſociety, and rendered the truth of God, when ſet in competition with human ſcience, beneath reſpect, and even unworthy of enquiry. But when Chriſtian truth ſhall be well diveſted of all the errors that have been mingled with it, ſome of which remain perhaps unſuſpected with many excellent characters; and when it ſhall triumph over all injuſtice and tyranny, with their

their innumerable dark machinations: and when it ſhall gain its rightful aſcendency over ſuperſtitious folly, its true excellence will be diſcovered, its abundant evidence will attract, and its accompanying efficacy, or energy, arreſt attention and regard: and belief in it will appear compatible with philoſophy or the knowledge of nature, as the ſame mental faculties which pry into the one, will perceive the worth and importance of the other. And then will Chriſtian faith appear to be rational and noble, as it really is when founded on knowledge, and the time of infidelity will be no longer eſteemed THE AGE OF REASON. The goſpel is truth and muſt therefore finally prevail, it only waits the downfall of that which is already in a tottering ſtate. *Then ſhall wiſdom and knowledge be the ſtability of the times. Then ſhall they no more teach every man his neighbour, ſaying know the Lord, all knowing him from the leaſt unto the greateſt. For the earth ſhall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.*

As ignorance has been the capital mean of enſlaving the world, when this is ſupplanted by knowledge, a ſafe and happy eſtabliſhment of liberty may be juſtly expected to ariſe. No knowledge can be more conducive to this than religious knowledge of the right kind, on account of the juſt conceptions it begets of freedom, and human rights; as it enlarges the views of the mind reſpecting relative utility; and becauſe the fetters of religious bigotry and ſuperſtition, which only ignorance can ſuffer to be rivetted, neceſſarily imply, and always entail civil bondage. On the removal of theſe ſervile fetters the mind be-

comes free, and is put into a capacity to cheriſh the ſentiments and to enjoy a condition of liberty. Chriſtianity is ſuperlatively excellent, and entitled to the moſt unreſerved eſteem for its friendſhip to freedom; and indeed ſuch is its nature that it cannot remain pure in connection with any ſhackles, and much leſs can it dictate or authoriſe the impoſition of them. When *James* and *John* in their ambition aſpired to dignity and power in the kingdom of Chriſt, our Lord diſcountenaced their carnal emulation, and aſſerted the inconſiſtency of proud dominion with the ſpirit of the goſpel. *Jeſus called them unto him, and ſaith unto them, ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles, exerciſe lordſhip over them, and their great ones exerciſe authority upon them: but ſo ſhall it not be among you.* Then, and indeed ever ſince, has the world preſented the deplorable ſcene of deſpotic power treading under foot the human race, but when the nations ſhall be compoſed of men properly influenced by the genius of Chriſtianity, it is impoſſible that any authority which is grinding or oppreſſive ſhould be found to prevail; *ſo ſhall it not be among you.* With civil and political freedom religious liberty muſt thrive, and to this the goſpel is highly favourable, as it excites us to examine and judge for ourſelves, to be fully perſuaded in our own minds, and openly to profeſs what we ſecretly believe to be truth, and not to cenſure or cendemn thoſe who differ. Diſſenſion, or the want of uniformity in religious opinions and profeſſion, has oft produced rancour in ſociety, and the million dreadful woes of perſecution,

perſecution, which have ſprung from not knowing, or not allowing to others, the rights of conſcience: but this ſhall be all buried in the ſame grave with ſuperſtition and ſlavery, when the goſpel ſhall conſummate the liberty of mankind. O liberty! fair offspring of heaven! men whom thou cameſt to bleſs have oft abuſed and diſhonoured thee; but ſtill thou retaineſt the lovely charms of thy native beauty and vigour, amidſt the numberleſs ſcars of ungrateful malice. Thy day to flouriſh is not far diſtant, when all the nations ſhall greet and cheriſh thee, and rejoice in the rich confluence of bleſſings which invariably attends thy ſtate to compoſe thy happy train.

When any particular vice is dethroned, its oppoſite virtue muſt aſſume its ſeat; and when by the influence of the goſpel all profaneneſs and immorality ſhall be effectually depreſſed, then ſhall juſtice and integrity be exalted in the earth, and righteouſneſs and peace ſhall embrace each other. Under the happy government of the Meſſiah, devotion and piety, ſhall become the buſineſs and delight of mankind. The whole creation ſhall preſent to the eyes of its glorious and adored Maker an appearance fair and beautiful, virtuous and well-pleaſing; it will preſent at his altar the family of nature reſtored, all the kindreds of the earth made alive from the dead, bleſſed in the ſeed of *Abraham*, and become the temples of the living God. *For from the riſing of the ſun even unto the going down of the ſame, my name*, ſaith he, *ſhall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incenſe ſhall be offered unto my name and a pure offering. In that day ſhall there be upon*

the bells of the horſes HOLINESS TO THE LORD, *and the pots in the Lord's houſe ſhall be like the bowls before the altar.* A ſpirit of benevolence and philanthropy will neceſſarily be predominant over all the depraved unruly paſſions, which have uſurped the dominion of the heart, which have brutaliſed the manners of men, and rendered them towards one another like unchained infernal furies. No more ſhall they traffick in blood, and ſcourge and enſlave, and make merchandiſe of fellow-creatures, for the ſweet of ſordid gain; nor by the inveterate rage and horrors of hoſtility, ſpread bloody havoc and deſolation. No more ſhall be heard the dreadful war-whoop, and the tremendous din and clatter of arms; cities ſhall no more be turned into ruinous heaps: nor ſhall the plains be covered with the groaning wounded, and the carcaſes of the ſlain, with their garments rolled in blood. Men ſhall be no longer ſavage, but harmoniſed in the concord of family relation, being brought into the unity of the ſpirit, and the bonds of peace. *If my kingdom were of this world*, ſaid Chriſt, *then would my ſervants fight that I ſhould not be delivered; but now is my kingdom not from hence.* Conſequently when this kingdom ſhall become univerſal, the fighting temper and all the artillery of war ſhall be utterly annihilated. The ſword ſhall be beaten into a plough-ſhare, and the ſpear into a pruning hook; neither ſhall they learn war any more. Lovely innocence and tranquil felicity, ſhall throughout all nature abound. Inſtead of the briar ſhall come up the myrtle tree. The wilderneſs and ſolitary place ſhall rejoice, and the deſart ſhall

bloſſom

bloſſom like the roſe. The hills and vallies on every ſide ſhall more ſignificantly clap their hands, than the richeſt natural harveſt could ever afford an occaſion for doing, and ſhout for joy, and alſo ſing. The child ſhall put his hand upon the cockatrice den; the wolf and the lamb ſhall feed together; the lion eat ſtraw like the ox; and they ſhall no more hurt nor deſtroy in all my holy mountain, ſaith the Lord.

In this ſtate of the world, if prophecy intend that ſuch ſhall be its condition at the complete downfall of antichriſt, and the ſetting up of the Redeemer's kingdom in its glory, will it not afford an irrefragable teſtimony to the truth of his declaration in its wideſt import, that he came into the world in the fulneſs of time, not to deſtroy men's lives but to ſave them; that he brought a diſpenſation of religion not to curſe but to bleſs mankind? And who that feels his heart glow with a warm affection for the goſpel of Chriſt, and who is animated with a love of humanity, will not in ardent hope and vehement deſire exclaim, may thy kingdom ſpeedily come?

To conclude, How well does the religion of Jeſus Chriſt challenge the enquiry and inveſtigation of men! The life of our bleſſed Redeemer loſes nothing of its excellence by examination, or being narrowly inſpected; nor will the gracious religion which he taught mankind, ſuffer by being well underſtood. Genuine Chriſtianity propoſes nothing to our attention that is contradictory and abſurd; it excites to no evil propenſities; it promiſes no ſenſual joys; and offers nothing to our attention that is unworthy

worthy and debaſing. It is the moſt complete ſyſtem of benevolence and tender mercy. Though often aſſailed by the ſhafts of ridicule and infidelity, it remains unhurt: its innate worth and perfection is its recommendation and glory, while the hand of divine providence is its guardian ſhield; and it only needs to be known, that it may become the object of general admiration and ardent eſteem.

A good underſtanding of the goſpel will convince us, that God has, by his merciful diſpenſation, done enough to produce this happy ſtate of the world, which Chriſtian, benevolent hope anticipates; and all that is needed is, for his providence to remove out of the way the exiſting obſtacles to its progreſs, that its pure principles may acquire a ſcope correſpondent to its worth. The goſpel of divine grace, unreſtrained and unimpeded, would of itſelf meliorate the manners of men, and civiliſe the moſt barbarous nations, and give to the world altogether a new appearance. Nothing that men can ſubſtitute in its ſtead, or connect with it, can poſſibly ſo well fulfil ſuch a glorious deſign as this alone; and we do not know that even divine wiſdom itſelf can ſuperſede Chriſtian truth by any other diſpenſation, better calculated, or more directly conducive to the accompliſhment of this great end.

And when we take a right view of Chriſtianity, we ſee how unjuſt it is to impute to it thoſe abominations which have been often practiſed, under a pretence of zeal for its intereſt and honour. Though Chriſtianity is moſt mild and compaſſionate, in innumerable inſtances it has been contended for, as to the outward

outward profeſſion of it, in a moſt unmerciful and barbarous manner. This has particularly appeared to be the caſe amongſt the powers of the world, when they have pretended to eſpouſe the Chriſtian cauſe. But real chriſtianity has not been the object of their concern, but a ſyſtem of craft and deluſion, to hold mankind in ſuperſtitious thraldom, diſguiſed under its name and forms. What the goſpel dictates unadulterated by human device, untainted by the profligacy of human ambition and power, admits of no ſuch vile contentions; nor is it indebted like the decaying banner of iniquity, to any ſuch ſanguinary and unrighteous modes of defence. The *weapons* of the Chriſtian warfare are *not carnal but ſpiritual, mighty through God.* Sometimes a ſeeming zeal for the truth of Chriſt degenerates into bitter rancour and animoſity: when that is the unhappy caſe, there muſt have previouſly been a departure from that part of Chriſtianity, which is a thouſand times more valuable and important than all ſpeculative notions which can be conceived; and that is the ſpirit of meekneſs, forbearance and charity, the very eſſence of the Chriſtian religion, which Chriſt both taught and practiſed. If this was the nature and deſign of his miſſion, it muſt of neceſſity be the nature and tenour of that ſyſtem of divine truth, which he left behind for the inſtruction and life of men; conſequently all the maxims and cuſtoms which obtain, and which are prejudicial in any degree to the true intereſts and happineſs of mankind, muſt be directly contrary to its dictates. As we value our ſoul's peace, the promotion of true religion and piety, and

the honour of our divine Maſter, let us ſtrive to ſhew what Chriſtianity is, in our own characters, by imitating the example of Chriſt, and doing good to others as far as we have opportunity, by relieving their neceſſities, eaſing their diſtreſſes, and alluring their feet to the paths of truth and righteouſneſs. All the virtues which are lovely and of good report, are recommended and enjoined by the goſpel of Jeſus; and in practiſing them we ſhall act obediently to the dictates of right reaſon and conſcience, conformably to all the precepts and directions of Chriſtian truth, in a manner beneficial to the world, ornamental to the doctrine of God our ſaviour, and agreably to the life of our glorious Pattern, who came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them.

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